

Upland classroom gets smarter, greener

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UPLAND - In a modernized classroom at Upland High School, students in Greg Wuetcher's English class read classics from the 1800s on their laptops.

On Tuesday morning, students were finishing up their essays on Herman Melville's "Moby Dick," circa 1851, and starting their readings on Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Minister's Black Veil," circa 1836.

And the students, who were doing their classwork by computer in an updated, 50-year-old classroom, are eating it up.

"I think it's better," said 16-year-old junior Alejandro Campos, who said he favors typing on his keyboard rather than writing things out longhand.

"We do our rough drafts on here," Alejandro said. "I write faster and better - and get the correct spellings. You get computer skills, too. I think you learn more by typing it."

At the front of the room, Wuetcher displays his lessons on the Smart Board.

The computerized Smart Board allows him to post Internet links that students can access from their desks or from their computers at home.

It's all part of the 21st-century classroom.

Wuetcher is already noticing improvements in the quality and quantity of the work his students are turning in.

"Almost 100 percent is done - and well done," Wuetcher said.

As a special bonus, a higher volume of assignments are being turned in, and they're done on time, he said.

The smarter, "greener" classroom, which makes use of both the latest academic and energy-efficient technology, is the brainchild of Upland Unified Superintendent Gary Rutherford.

"Daylighting" the classrooms, using skylights to provide natural lighting, is more energy-efficient, Rutherford said.

It provides a better learning environment, said Principal Guy Roubian.

"Research has shown natural lighting improves the mood," Roubian said. "Students are more focused and relaxed."

It was a challenge to transform one of Upland High School's older classrooms, built in 1956, Roubian said. But it's been worthwhile.

The classroom, the first in the district, features laptops for every student, microphones for teacher and students and upgraded fiber-optics to maximize speed on the Internet.

The school is eager to get teachers' feedback on how the high-tech tools can be used to aid each core discipline, Roubian said.

The first-quarter English class will be followed by science, social studies and math classes - all taking advantage of the new technology in Room C-125.

Science students will get to see what's under the microscope en masse, via the LCD projector and Smart Board, Roubian said.

Wuetcher said going digital allows him to check students' essays before they turn them in. "I can give better one-on-one instruction," he said.

"We want to have every learning environment look like that one," said Rutherford, who anticipates adding such a classroom to every school in the district at some point in the future.

The district has hired a consultant to look for state matching grants for that purpose, he said.

One of those options is the new High Performance Incentive grants announced by the Governor's Office last week. The state Department of General Services is making \$100 million available for safer and healthier learning environments in K-12 schools.

The funding for more energy- and resource-efficient classrooms was approved by California voters last year under Proposition 1D.

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